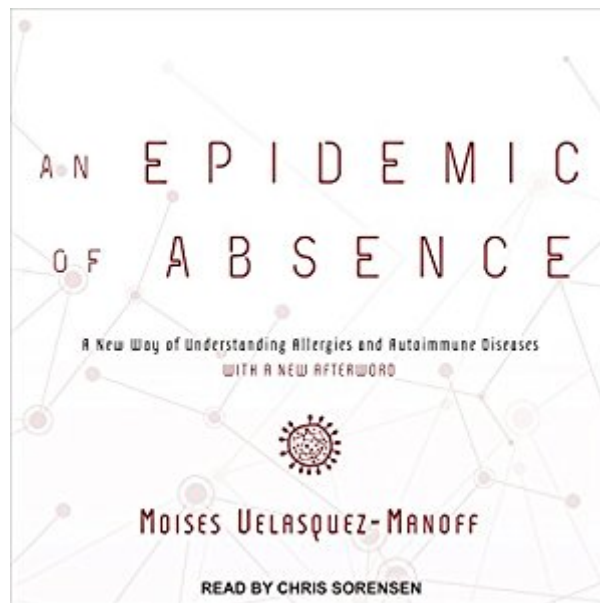


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# An Epidemic Of Absence: A New Way Of Understanding Allergies And Autoimmune Diseases



## Synopsis

An Epidemic of Absence asks what will happen in developing countries, which, as they become more affluent, have already seen an uptick in allergic disease: Will India end up more allergic than Europe? Velasquez-Manoff also details a controversial underground movement that has coalesced around the treatment of immune-mediated disorders with parasites. Against much of his better judgment, he joins these do-it-yourselfers and reports his surprising results. An Epidemic of Absence considers the critical immune stimuli we inadvertently lost as we modernized, and the modern ills we may be able to correct by restoring them. At stake is nothing less than our health and that of our loved ones. Researchers, meanwhile, have the good fortune of living through a paradigm shift, one of those occasional moments in the progress of science when a radically new way of thinking emerges, shakes things up, and suggests new avenues of treatment. You'll discover that you're not you at all, but a bustling collection of organisms, an ecosystem whose preservation and integrity requires the utmost attention and care.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Moises Velasquez-Manoff's book "An Epidemic of Absence" is nothing less than revolutionary. Speaking as a physician, we have known for some years about the mysterious connection between "hygiene" and some allergic diseases such as asthma; however, the mechanism and evolutionary history involved have been mostly unexplored. Velasquez-Manoff rigorously lays out a detailed synthesis of what cutting-edge scientists have discovered about the connections between

autoimmune disease (asthma, allergies, arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease etc.) and the recent eradication of symbiotic bacteria and intestinal parasites in the modern world. He is very thorough in his review of the current scientific knowledge about the topic, and is able to weave together parts of this puzzle giving the reader a front row seat in the unfolding of a new chapter of our understanding of human health. The author tells this story from a personal and sometimes humorous perspective, taking us on a fascinating journey through our bodies and evolution. As a physician, a father, and as a human, I can tell you that this will be one of the most important books you will read, illuminating your understanding of human health and our connection to the living world around us (and inside us)!

In a comprehensive and compelling book, Moises Velaquez Manoff has provided an updated version of the hygiene hypothesis to explain: Why is there more autoimmune diseases in the modern world? While the idea that we are now no longer exposed to enough pathogens and therefore our immune system is beginning to attack our bodies is certainly not new, the author has provided a comprehensive review of the lots of new evidence supporting this hypothesis. This area of research is growing rapidly and as an active research scientist in this field, I found this book to be a terrific compilation of almost all the most important studies out there. Through interviews with most of the leading scientists in this field, the author has been able to synthesize their thoughts into laypersons terms. I gave this book to my parents after reading it, because it explained to them the concepts behind the type of research that I was doing now. Indeed, if I were to have the time, this would have been the book that I would have liked to write. There are very few things missing in it, and indeed many more ideas and stories that I had never come across. The book is also livened up by personal stories of individuals who have taken matters into their own hands by infecting themselves with parasites to treat their symptoms of auto-immunity. Indeed, the author chronicles his own voyage in this regard. His writing captures the personalities of some of these individuals very well and reminds us that these autoimmune diseases are devastating many lives in our modern world. The author starts by describing how the environment we live in has undergone rapid changes from the perspective of the microbes that we are exposed to and then begins to examine, one disease at a time, how these diseases may be linked with exposure to microbes. What has revolutionized this field over the last few years has been the increased appreciation of how our commensal gut bacteria affect our immune systems and this book will bring you up to date with the most recent studies in this field. Through interviews with scientists, a picture is painted of how parasites and microbes may provide protection against diseases like inflammatory bowel disease,

asthma, multiple sclerosis and so on. A particularly interesting idea is put forward regarding the effects on pregnancy and autism, which was also discussed in a New York Time opinion piece. This book is a terrific read for anyone interested in how the immune system interacts with pathogens and commensals, providing a laypersons explanation for the rise of diseases where the immune response is dysregulated. This hypothesis is now in the main stream of science and no longer a fringe idea and is a very exciting place to be as a research scientist.

The "Hygiene Hypothesis" has been around a long time, but I certainly have never encountered such a complete explanation of it before this book! As the other reviewers have said, basically the author's argument is that humans evolved with so many parasites and commensal bacteria and other organisms that our immune systems function with them. And when we live in such a "clean" environment that they are cleared from our bodies our immune systems misfire, causing allergies, at the least, and autoimmune dysfunction at the worst. It is a powerful argument, especially for anyone considering having children ... the message I took from the book was expose them to as much as possible before age 2 -- other children, crowded subways, farm animals, the mass of humanity that so many of us try to shield young children from! The second argument of the book is that re-habitation by our former passengers, parasites, might be used to treat or cure autoimmune diseases like MS, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, etc is equally compelling, and the author goes so far as to infect himself with hookworm. The only place his argument was not particularly compelling was trying to tie the hygiene hypothesis to cancer ... the chapter did not convince me, though I learned quite a bit from it. Finally, I would encourage all parents of autistic children to read this book. Whether or not you buy his argument that autism is partly an autoimmune dysfunction it doesn't hurt to try some of the things he (and others) suggest, particularly the gluten free diet that has proven so remarkably effective in autistic children.

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